



DHRM HR Highlights February 2021

Nutrition and Women's Health

Healthy eating and balanced nutrition provide energy for women's busy lives and help to reduce the risk of disease. Women, just like men, should enjoy a variety of healthful foods from all of the food groups, including whole grains, fruits, vegetables, healthy fats, low-fat dairy and lean protein. Women also have some unique nutritional needs, including needing more of certain vitamins and minerals during different stages of life including pregnancy or after menopause.

Since women typically have less muscle, more body fat and are smaller than men, they need fewer calories to maintain a healthy body weight and activity level. Included below are more details specific for women.

Eating a variety of whole grains such as whole-grain bread, whole-wheat cereal, whole-wheat pasta, brown rice or oats is essential for brain health, energy, and adequate intake of B-vitamins. In addition, a wide variety of fruits and vegetables should be included for fiber, boosted immunity, and disease prevention. Fresh, frozen or canned (without added sugar or salt) fruits and vegetables can meet dietary needs. Women should also include low fat dairy products like milk, yogurt, or calcium-fortified soymilk for calcium and Vitamin D. Finally, protein foods such as lean meat, fish, eggs, beans, lentils, nuts and seeds should be included in meals and snacks for lean muscle repair.

Women also have unique needs for certain vitamins and minerals depending on the stage of lifecycle. For example, iron needs increase during pregnancy and decrease after reaching menopause. Foods that provide iron include meat, poultry, fish, kale, spinach, beans, lentils and some fortified cereals. Plant-based sources of iron are more easily absorbed in digestion when eaten with vitamin C-rich foods.

Adequate intake of folic acid is important in decreasing the risk of birth defects for women of childbearing age. Women who are pregnant or breastfeeding may need a dietary supplement with folic acid. Women should check with their health care provider or a Registered Dietitian before starting any supplement.

Finally, to maintain healthy bones and teeth, women need to eat calcium-rich foods every day. Calcium is a mineral that keeps bones strong and decreases the risk for osteoporosis, a disease that weakens the structure of bones and increases risk for fracture. Getting appropriate amounts of vitamin D also is important, as it helps the body absorb calcium. The need for both calcium and vitamin D increases as women get older. Good sources of vitamin D include fatty fish, such as salmon, and eggs. There are also many options for fortified foods and beverages, like milk, plant-based milk alternatives, yogurts and juices that provide both calcium and vitamin D.

Women can access more information on healthy eating at <https://www.eatright.org/food/nutrition/dietary-guidelines-and-myplate/healthy-eating-for-women> and <https://www.womenshealth.gov/healthy-eating/healthy-eating-and-women>

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